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Application Fast Track Approvals Act 2014: Oaklands Estates Nelson Ltd

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1.0 Introduction

Oaklands Estate Nelson Ltd [Oaklands Estate] are applying under the *Fast Track Approvals Act 2014* to develop 54 hectares of greenfield landholding in Stoke, Nelson into residential lots. The property is currently part of Oaklands Farm, a property owned and farmed by the Saxton / Raine family since 1844. Oaklands Homestead, gardens and surrounds are not part of this application.

This document is to provide a summary of the potential archaeological values of the development landholding, and to recommend future actions to address the risk.

The document does not consider wāhi tūpuna (sites of significance to Māori) except for those with archaeological values, and in that case does not consider the cultural and spiritual significance of the sites to Māori. Cultural values are the province of Māori and should be addressed by them.

2.0 The Proposal

The development is still at the concept stage. A concept plan (dated 30/03/2026) was viewed. It is understood that across the 54 hectares there will be a mixture of residential development, residential hill sites, high density residential development, a retirement village, retail and areas of stormwater management and recreation. Earthworks are required across the full site extent.

3.0 Setting

The property is situated at Stoke. It is on flat land at the base of the Barnicoat Range stretching up to the gentle hill slopes. The land is currently part of Oaklands Farm and zoned rural. It is predominantly in grazing with some specimen trees, part of a woodland and areas of exotic and native planting. There are several water courses, including Saxton Creek, running through the property. According to Julian Raine, the present owner, these have all been altered and / or created to drain the property.

4.0 Statutory Requirements

There are no recorded archaeological sites on the property. There are no places on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero.

Oaklands, the 1841 / 1844 Saxton family homestead at 467 Suffolk Road, is a Category A building on Appendix 1: Buildings, Places & Objects in the operative Nelson Resource Management Plan (NRMP). Also at the Oaklands property, on Appendix 2: Heritage Trees is a heritage woodland (W42), 80 heritage *Quercus robur* (English oak) trees, 2 heritage *Quercus robur* at the entrance to the property, a landscape *Quercus palustris* (Pin oak), a landscape *Quercus cerris* (Turkey Oak) and a landscape *Podocarpus totara* (Totara). Part of the heritage woodland and some of the individual trees are within the development area.

5.0 Historical Background

5.1 Māori Occupation and Use of the Area

The Māori history and relationship to the area is best provided by iwi; however, the following summary of Māori occupation in the area is included here to provide context for the assessment of archaeological values.

No reference to Māori occupation or any wāhi tūpuna / sites in this area was found in the sources examined. Iwi may have further knowledge that this author is not aware of.

Māori settlement in the area was concentrated around the edges and islands of Waimea Inlet. Waimea Inlet was an area of extensive Māori occupation and use from the early settlement phase to the historic period. The inlet provided sheltered canoe routes, landings and camp sites. There was easy access to various estuarine, river and marine resources as well as to wetlands and cultivable land (including the large Māori made horticultural soils of the Waimea / Waimeha Gardens which are across the Waimea Plains). The inlet would have been part of a seasonal round of activities. The extensiveness and range of evidence at some locations also suggest that in places settlement was likely to have been permanent or semi-permanent and occurred over a long period of time.

The eastern side of Waimea Inlet, adjacent to Stoke, was once fringed by flax and raupo wetland. This would have been an important food and resource gathering area for Māori. Further inland there were the larger trees of the Coastal Flats Ecosystem. There are no known kāinga or settlements around inland Stoke. Although the inland area was a less favourable location for Māori settlement, it is possible that there were small kāinga or camps and accompanying garden areas on the coastal flats. These would be most likely near streams. Transitory movement and resource gathering would have also occurred within the area.

5.2 Colonial Settlement

Stoke was part of the New Zealand Company's 50-acre accommodation or suburban sections in what was known as Waimea East or Suburban South. Under the New Zealand Company settlement scheme each paying settler was to receive a town acre along with 50 acres of suburban farmland and 150 acres of rural land. Stoke was initially known as Brook Green, but was renamed by the first settler William Songer, in memory of his English birthplace¹. The earliest settlers in the area were mainly small-time farmers. Hops, oats, wheat, barley and potatoes were the first crops to be grown in the Stoke area. By the mid-1890s fruit-growing became the main horticultural industry and there were extensive orchards across the flats.

¹ <https://www.theprow.org.nz/places/settlement-in-stoke/>

John Waring and Priscilla Saxton with their five children and other family members arrived in Nelson in 1842². The Saxtons initially lived in Nelson township. The family had a disheartening start in the colony but in 1844 they acquired land at Stoke, replacing their originally allocated suburban section. Over the years this expanded into the extensive landholdings at Oaklands that the family, eight generations later, still farms. Saxton's farm was "steep, hillish and swampy"³. It was transformed by the family into a productive farm with sheep, some cattle, hops, apples and cereals. In the 1930s dairying became more important and that remains today one of the prime functions of the property.

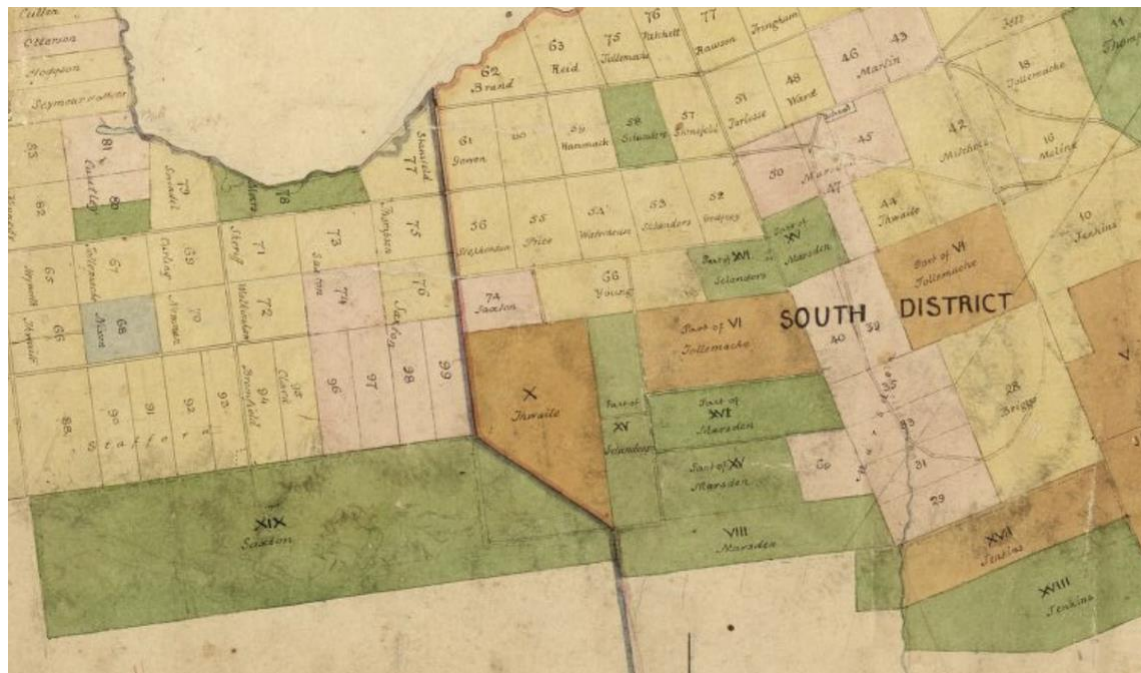


Figure 1: The Saxton landholdings in 1847.

² This is summarized version of the history of the property taken from sources including <https://www.oaklandsfarm.co.nz/historyofaoklands/>; <https://www.theprow.org.nz/people/the-saxton-legacy/>; <https://www.theprow.org.nz/people/john-waring-saxton/>; <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/topic/1222>; and conversation with Julian Raine 14/03/2026.



Figure 2: 1850s plan drawn by J.W. Saxton. This shows the Saxton house, farm buildings, and farming infrastructure and development (including drains, fences and cultivation). A dotted line depicts the “Track of the old Waimea Road beneath the hills used to avoid the swamp below until they were drained, & the regular public road made below”. Note the different course of the stream.

Plan held by the Raine family (reproduced with their permission).



Figure 2a: Detail of above plan. The only building still in existence is the “house” – Oaklands homestead which is not within the application.

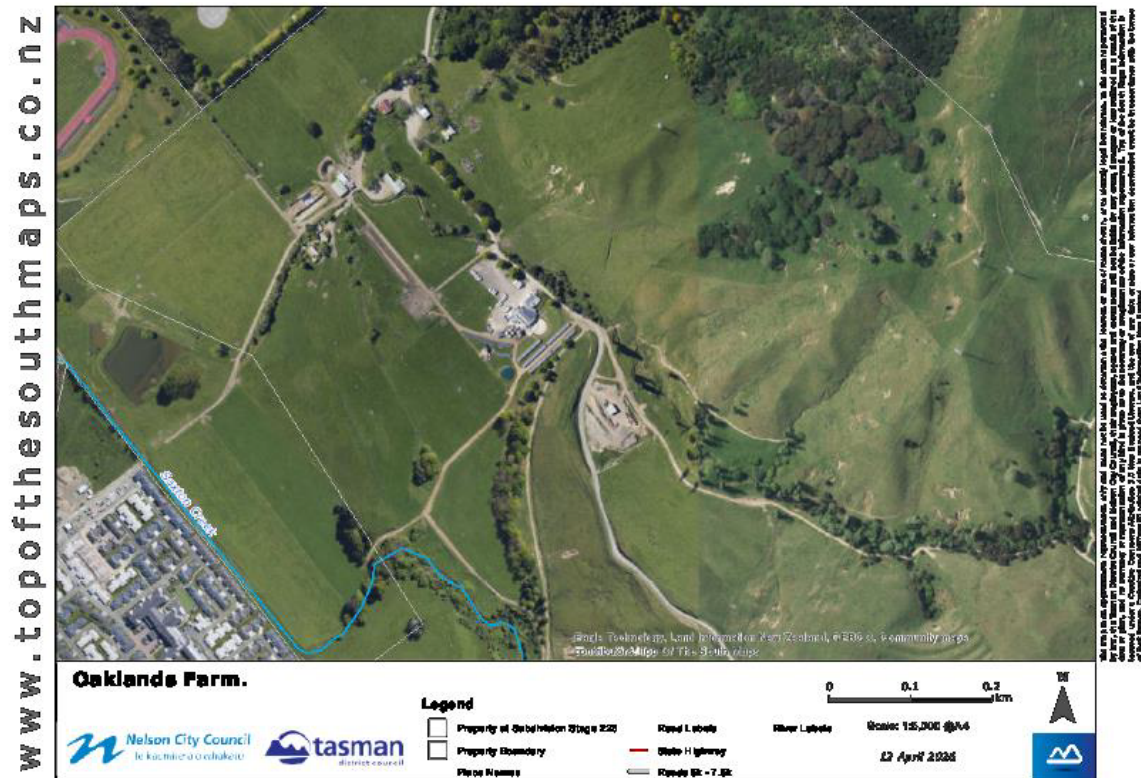


Figure 5: The development area today.

6.0 Archaeological Background

The nearest recorded archaeological sites to the subject development area are N27/234 Orphanage Street Railway Bridge (1873) and N27/230 Saxton Creek Railway Bridge (1873). The sites are part of the 1873 Nelson Railway which ran along the coastal edge, approximately 800 m to the north east of the subject property. In the hills to the south is O27/214 1883 Champion Track and to the west, O27/300 St Marys Orphanage, O27/119 Ngawhatu Hospital piggery (1935) and O27/220 Ngawhatu Hospital water tank (1934). None of these sites will be affected by the development.

The nearest Māori archaeological site is N27/135, find spot of a hammerstone and adze, found on the foreshore of the Waimea Inlet, near the end of Beach Road (ca. 2.3 km away). Monitoring in 2021 – 2024 of flood control works in lower Saxton Creek resulted in no Māori archaeological sites or taonga being uncovered⁴.

⁴ Young 2024.



Figure 6: Recorded archaeological sites in the vicinity of the development area.

7.0 Site Visit

A site visit to Oaklands Farm and the subject development area was made by Young on 14/03/2026. Julian Raine generously showed me around the property and provided information on the history of Oaklands Farm. The visit had been preceded by a discussion on the phone with Raine.

Present buildings within the farm complex were identified by Raine. There is a 1920s – 1930s walk through herringbone cow shed that was considerably modified in the 1970s; a 1930s 4-stand shearing shed (once powered by a pelton wheel but now electric); 1970s yards that replaced 1930s ones; a 1950s / 1970s open sided barn; modern tractor shed and implement sheds. There is a twentieth century farm cottage for the herd manager (ca. 1930s).

The farm complex was also the location of historic Saxton / Raine farm buildings including a stable, stockyard, barn, smithy and ford and cottage (refer to Figure 2 for buildings there by 1850s). None of these buildings are still standing and there is no visible surface evidence. The 2-storey stables were burnt down in the mid-1960s by Raine's father Richard as it was in a dangerous, dilapidated condition. The area was later dug up for a farm road and is presently graveled. The smithy and ford collapsed and was later demolished. Raine thinks that the smithy was on stone piles. Other modification of the area occurred when the 1930s yards were replaced in the 1970s. The area was dug over and Waimea stones were brought in to make a free draining area for the new yards.

Raine also identified the line of the historic Waimea Road, also used as a farm cart road to get to the farm buildings (see Figure 2). This is edged by mature trees and partly utilized as a farm driveway. The portion that

once ran through the development area past the farm complex is no longer discernable.



Figure 7: Standing on the line of the old Waimea Road / farm dray track looking south towards the 1930s shearing shed. The stables were in the graveled area on the northern side of the woolshed (facing the camera).



Figure 8: The 1930s shearing shed and 1970s yards. The stables were to the right of the shearing shed.



Figure 9: The milking shed. In the approximate area of the 1850s barn.



Figure 10: The site of the smithy and ford.

Raine pointed out the drainage ditches and waterways. All watercourses across the farm have been modified in some way across the decades of farming. Many of the drains were dug by hand in the nineteenth century to drain the swampy ground. Some of the drains run along the original trajectory (for example, the drain going south from the milking shed) although have been cleaned many times. Saxton Creek has only been called that in recent times. The stream has had its course altered, diverted to the south.



Figure 11: Machine dug section of drainage ditch on east side of farm complex. This shows part of the development area looking east towards the Oaklands Milk complex.



Figure 12: Drainage ditch originally hand dug although modified by maintenance.

8.0 Assessment of Affects

The development plan has not yet been finalized. However, it is understood that earthworks will be required across the full site extent. This will likely modify or destroy any archaeological evidence within the development area.

The development area has been part of the Saxton / Raine Oaklands Farm since the 1840s. The Raines have supposedly retained within the family land holdings the homestead, gardens and most of the woodland / heritage plantings. The known section of the old Waimea Road will be retained by the family as will a dam in the hills.

The development area is predominantly in pasture with a complex of farm buildings and farm accommodation in the approximate middle. Historic pre-1900 farm buildings were once within this same area.

There is no visible evidence of pre-1900 structures or buildings within the development area. These have been removed over time by the family. Raine suggests that it would be unlikely there would be sub-surface remains of pre-1900 buildings within the present farm complex based on the post-demolition modification that occurred to the area and the building of new farm infrastructure. However, this is unknown. The presence of subsurface remains of pre-1900 buildings and structures within the farm complex cannot be ruled out. There may also be pre-1900 historic rubbish deposits, evidence of farming infrastructure (such as fence lines) and possibly old road and track layers within the wider development area. The location of the early cottage shown on the 1850s plan is not known by this author. There may be remains associated with that building such as rubbish deposits, a long drop or even a well. Any evidence of the early Saxton farming operation would have high historical significance and, depending on the nature of the evidence, possibly high archaeological and technological significance.

The pattern and form of historic drainage ditches is still discernable. It is unlikely that there will be any intact, pre-1900 hand dug faces still present. The ditches are functional pieces of farm infrastructure and have been maintained over time.

Three heritage ash trees are within the farm complex area. The remaining trees were planted by Richard Raine in the 1980s. The heritage woodland (W42) on NRMP Appendix 2: Heritage Trees extends across this area along with individual heritage trees. An old oak, planted by Saxton, is in what is known as the Chet Field, the location of the proposed retirement village. This is recorded on NRMP: Appendix 2. Two other English oaks at the Saxton Road entrance to the development are heritage trees also recorded on NRMP: Appendix 2. I understand that an appropriately qualified arborist will be considering the heritage and landscape trees, and the effects of the development on the trees and woodland.

It is unlikely that there will evidence of Māori occupation within the development area. There are no known places of wāhi tupuna within the vicinity. Much of the lower land was once swampy. The course of Saxton Creek is not original. Māori are likely to have moved through the area and used it for resource collection and as a mahinga kai / food gathering place. These types of activity leave little physical evidence. Find spots of taonga such as toki / adzes and evidence of a small kāinga or camp in the form of midden, pakoke / argillite flakes and ovens / fires are the most likely kinds of evidence that could be encountered although that risk is low. It is notable that over the 180 years of Saxton / Raine family occupation, no evidence of Māori activity or any taonga has been found on the land (as far as the Raine family is aware).

9.0 Recommendations

There is a risk of pre-1900 archaeological evidence being present within the development area that could be modified or damaged by development earthworks. Any such evidence is most likely to be associated with the Saxton / Raine family's Oakland Farm. To manage the risk of encountering archaeological evidence, an archaeological authority under S48 of the *Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Act 2014* should be acquired before earthworks commence. This will require a more comprehensive archaeological assessment, mitigation strategy and consultation with Te Tau Ihu iwi. As part of the development design, retention of any evidence of the early farm buildings or structures should be considered.

Consideration should be given to retaining any heritage trees within the development area due to their historic value and association with the Saxton / Raine family.

Consultation with iwi should occur, if not already commenced. Iwi will have knowledge about the area that this author does not have access to.

10.0 Conclusion

Oaklands Estate intends to develop part of the historically significant Oaklands Farm. The Saxton / Raine family have been living on and farming the property since 1844, one of the earliest and most continuous colonial family farming operations in New Zealand. Although the family have retained most of the important heritage features associated with the property, there is still the potential for earthworks associated with the Oaklands Estate development to modify or destroy pre-1900 archaeological evidence. The risk of this should be managed by an application to modify archaeological site(s) under s48 of the *Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Act 2014*.

11.0 Bibliography

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Web based resources.

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